

The Builder.

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OUR Fine Arts! Poor Barry!

Or rather let us confine our exclamation to poor fine arts, since the badgering to which the latter is periodically exposed has served, up to this time, only to elicit eloquent tributes to his integrity and ability from men in power, who had otherwise, perhaps, been silent. Still, abuse is not agreeable or useful: condemnation, just or unjust, has its effect in lessening confidence, and gives a cry to a party; and wise men, who know what repetition of it has done in the case of others, will take all prudent means to combat it and make its injustice obvious. On Monday last, after much previous threatening, Mr. Osborne brought under the notice of the House the expenditure of money at the new Houses of Parliament, and the unnecessary length of time which has been occupied in their progress. "Since the days of the celebrated architect Amphion," he said, "who is reported to have moved the stones and raised the walls of Thebes at the sound of his lyre, there had not been a name more bruited about by the voice of Fame than that of Mr. Barry. But there was this remarkable difference between the heathen architect and the Christian, that whereas the works of the former were finished in an inconceivably short space of time, the works of the latter had been spread over a period which was not yet brought to a close, and he ventured to predict, unless the House took them into their own hands, never would be brought to a close in the lifetime of the present generation. What he was anxious to establish on the present occasion was, first, that there had been a most reckless expenditure of the public money, without a due exercise of public control, in the building of the new Houses of Parliament; and, secondly, that there had been a most unnecessary delay in carrying on the works." He failed, however, in doing either.

This "unnecessary delay" cry is a monstrous absurdity; it has been demonstrated to be such again and again, and would scarcely be listened to any where out of the House of Commons, where art is little thought of and less understood. Compare the progress which has been made with that of any of the cathedrals of the middle ages at home and abroad, painfully built up during centuries; ask how long it took to complete St. Peter's, of the Vatican; how many architects and how many years passed away before this was achieved; and look to St. Paul's, raised by one man in about thirty years, an often-quoted contrast with the last example; and it must be at once admitted by those who know the extent and elaborate nature of the works at Westminster, that much more has been done there within the time than could reasonably have been anticipated. Mr. Barry made a great and unfortunate mistake when he named six years as the period for completing the building, but the Government would have made a much greater mistake if they had attempted to force the architect to verify his prediction,—it was quite out of the question, and wholly unde-

sirable if it were practicable. Even the delay caused by the differences which occurred between the architect and Dr. Reid, as to the ventilation, might have been anticipated—such differences, in one shape or another, being consequent on extensive undertakings of this sort. Our opinions, however, on this head, have been so often repeated, and are so well known, having been quoted by our contemporaries from one end of the kingdom to the other, that we need scarcely say more upon it.

Mr. Osborne, in the course of his speech, seemed to shew great want of knowledge of the subject and of correct information. In respect of a charge for change of stone from that originally intended, he said, for example, when scrutinising the excess of expenditure, that "in 1839 a roving commission of geologists was appointed, who went through England and Wales to examine the different qualities of stone. On the 16th of March, 1839, that commission made its report. The expense of that tour of inspection, mixed up with some other items, was 4,902l. 3s. 10d. It was natural to suppose that, having the benefit of this commission, a stone would have been selected such as was applicable to all purposes. But this was not the case: the stone originally adopted was not at all suited to endure the weather, and, consequently, a charge of no less than 22,000l. had been incurred for changing stone." An entirely wrong statement. The honourable gentleman was also understood to condemn the appointment of the commission altogether,—an appointment which every scientific man in England rejoiced at.

Even Mr. Hume, however—the only strong supporter Mr. Osborne found—was obliged to point out his error in this respect. He said—

"With regard to the stone used for the building, he might observe that he (Mr. Hume) had recommended the building should not be begun until they were sure of finding a sufficient quantity of stone of the best quality, and all of one colour. A commission had been appointed for that purpose, and most ably had they performed their duty. A visit to the museum in Craig's-court, where there are specimens of all the kinds of stone in the country, would at once enable builders to compare the relative merits of each, and determine what kind they would use. That commission had been of great service to the country, and the Government deserved every credit for appointing it."

In respect of the expenditure, the broad statement that the amount of the original estimate was 707,104l., and that 1,400,000l. had been already expended, produced an effect of course; but Lord Lincoln, who, in conjunction with Lord Morpeth and Sir Robert Peel came bravely to the rescue, put a different complexion upon it. His lordship said—

"He would now come to the statement of the hon. member for Middlesex with respect to the present expense of the building. If he understood him right he had again stated that evening what he had certainly stated before the recess, viz., that the original estimate for the building was 707,000l., and that 1,400,000l. had been already expended upon it. Now he begged to assure the House that this statement was entirely erroneous. It was true that 1,400,000l. was the estimate now given of the total cost of the works executed and to be executed; but that was not the amount already expended on the works. The whole sum actually advanced upon the works of the building up to the present time as appeared by the return was 833,000l. [Lord Morpeth—808,000l.] The return he referred to made it 833,000l.; but there was no doubt some good reason for the discrepancy between the noble lord's statement and his own. But how stood

the case as regarded the expenditure being an excess of the original expenditure?

The original estimate was.... £707,104
Sum actually paid up to the
present time £808,864 808,864
For embankment and other extras..... 378,097

Leaving paid already for works in estimate 430,767

Now, surely, when discussing this case it was but fair to let the real state of the case be represented. He was not attempting to prove that there might not be an eventual excess—perhaps a considerable one. He was merely showing that whereas it had been said that 1,400,000l. had been already expended—the original estimate being 707,000l.—the real fact was that only 430,000l. had yet been expended on works included in the estimate. According to the statement of the hon. member for Middlesex, there had been already expended 693,000l. beyond the estimate; whereas in reality there remained to be expended of the original estimate 276,000l. He (Lord Lincoln) had taken the trouble to refer to a former report on this subject, and he begged to call the attention of the House to some of the works which the hon. gentleman had charged against the architect as being included in his original estimate, whereas they were additional works which had been subsequently sanctioned by the House. For example—

River wall	£35,902
Purchase of property.....	82,054
Extra foundations.....	35,063
Fire-proofing.....	21,000
Warming and ventilating.....	65,000
Change of stone.....	22,000
For House of Lords, grant last year	40,000
And iron roofing, nearly	50,000 "

Mr. Bernal objected, by inference, at all events, to the employment of the fine arts in the decoration of the houses, and of the appointment of a Committee in furtherance of them,—admitting, honestly enough, that he was not a man of taste, and incompetent to form an opinion on the subject.

In reply to this Lord Morpeth said,—"He would not, any more than his hon. friend, venture to pronounce any judgment upon the style of the building. That was a matter of hygone times, and as there were many members of the house, there might be many minds upon it. The style selected was a highly decorated style, which they knew was a highly expensive one. Neither would he now enter upon a discussion of the propriety of appointing a Commission of Fine Arts. Her Majesty's present Government were not responsible for that commission, but he must say that he did not think the country at large would at all sympathise with the attempt made by his hon. friend to cast discredit upon the opening which had been made for giving encouragement to the rising talent of the country. Of course he agreed with his hon. friend that substantial utility ought not to be postponed to decoration, but bare walls might properly be covered by pictures, and he could not help thinking that his hon. friend had been unduly severe upon the frescoes in the House of Lords. They were not, it was true, perfect, but they were creditable examples of a new mode of art, and he had no doubt that the most competent judges would confirm this verdict, which he ventured with diffidence to pronounce. Of course he did not mean to deny that this had been a most expensive building, and had considerably exceeded the sum estimated as the cost of its completion, but he put it to the House, whether it could fairly have been expected to be otherwise? The original design of a building of such vast magnitude and such various uses could only have embraced the general arrangement and character of the building. Many errors of the architect which must have been originally included in the design—many difficulties which he did not then foresee—could only be considered and corrected as the architect came to deal with the requirements made upon him. The modifications required from him had been endless, both from committees of that House and from the heads of departments connected with the public service. Since the first stone of the Houses of Parliament was laid, the growth of public business had been immense, and re-